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OFFENSIVE WEAPONS

22

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Reviewed by: Elijah Kelly Jr.

Date: 5/23/88

Chairman Khrushchev states, in his letter of October 28: "In the Soviet Government, in addition to earlier instructions on the discontinuance of further work on weapons construction sites, has given a new order to dismantle the arms which you described as offensive, and to crate and return them to the Soviet Union."

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What are the arms which President Kennedy had, prior to Chairman Khrushchev's letter of October 28, "described as offensive"?

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The answer to this question is to be found primarily in four documents.

Press Conference of September 13, 1962

The first document is the transcript of the President's press conference of September 13, 1962, in which he made clear that the United States could not accept a Communist buildup in Cuba that might "endanger or interfere with our security in any way" nor could we accept to have Cuba "become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union". Later in the press conference the President refined this concept further by making it clear that the United States would act "if Cuba should possess a capacity to carry out offensive action against the United States." This concept that offensive arms are those that provide a capacity to

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deliver weapons against the soil of this country or of the soil of other American states is the implicit theme in all of the President's subsequent references to the subject.

Address of October 22

The second relevant document is President Kennedy's address of October 22, 1962, a copy of which was formally delivered to the Soviet Government. In his address, President Kennedy spoke of the discovery of "offensive missile sites" in Cuba, stating that the "purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against the Western Hemisphere." After discussing these missile sites, the President states:

"In addition, jet bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons, are now being uncrated and assembled in Cuba, while the necessary air bases are being prepared".

The President further said:

"This urgent transformation of Cuba into an important strategic base--by the presence of these large, long-range, and clearly offensive weapons of sudden mass destruction, constitutes an explicit threat to the peace and security of all the Americas, ..."

Proclamation of October 23

The concept of offensive weapons as including both missiles and jet bomber systems was given more precise

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definition in the Proclamation issued by President Kennedy on October 23, entitled: "Interdiction of the Delivery of Offensive Weapons to Cuba." The proclamation was directed at preventing "the delivery of offensive weapons and associated materiel to Cuba." It specified as "prohibited materiel":

Surface-to surface missiles; bomber aircraft; bombs, air-to-surface rockets and guided missiles; warheads for any of the above weapons; mechanical or electronic equipment to support or operate the above items; and any other classes of materiel hereafter designated by the Secretary of Defense for the purpose of effectuating this Proclamation.

Letter of October 27

In addition to these three documents, the President's letter of October 27 to Chairman Khrushchev should also be regarded as illuminating the term "offensive weapons." In that letter, the President stated:

"The first thing that needs to be done, however, is for work to cease on offensive missile bases in Cuba and for all weapons systems in Cuba capable of offensive use to be rendered inoperable, under effective United Nations arrangements."

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The letter further provides:

"You would agree to remove these weapons systems
from Cuba under appropriate United Nations observation
and supervision"

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